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# Russia With CIA Detour

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Nearly eight years ago, a letter was mailed from the Soviet Union to Robert M. McElwain, a Massachusetts schoolteacher.

It never reached its destination, but McElwain has finally received a copy of it, courtesy of the CIA.

McElwain wrote to the CIA several months ago, asking to see any file, it might have compiled on him. He made his request under the Freedom of Information Act but he hardly expected the agency to know who he was.

But McElwain received a brief letter from the CIA, noting that it had a "single reference" to the 38-year-old Harvard, Mass., resident who teaches French and Spanish in a Lincoln, Mass., junior high school.

THE FILE WAS "classified and divulges intelligence sources and methods," the CIA letter said, and could therefore not be released.

His curiosity aroused, McElwain decided to appeal the decision and enlisted the aid of his congressman, Rep. Robert F. Drinan, D-Mass.

On May 21, John F. Blake, chairman of the CIA's Information Review Committee, sent McElwain a letter informing him that the agency now had decided to release the file.

The file contained a copy of the missing letter from the Soviet Union.

The Soviet letter was written Aug. 18, 1967, by a Russian teacher who McElwain and his wife had met while the Russian was studying at Harvard Business School.

In 64 words, including salutations and closing, the Russian said he was preparing his teaching materials and planned to

spend his vacation at the Black Sea.

THE CIA DECIDED the message was worth saving on microfilm, but it says it does not know why the original letter never reached McElwain.

"We can all wonder as much as we want to, but we're not going to discuss the matter further," a CIA spokesman said.

Writing to Drinan, CIA Director William E. Colby explained that for 20 years the agency opened selected mail between Communist countries and the United States.

But, he said, "our records give no indication that we retained the original letter in our files, which would not be the normal procedure, and an extensive review of the situation has failed to shed any additional light on the subject."

The Rockefeller commission report on the CIA, issued Tuesday, said the mail opening was unlawful and did not meet national security criteria that would have made it legal. The operation was halted in 1973 when the chief postal inspector refused to allow it to continue without high-level approval.

McELWAIN SAID in a telephone interview that he received a long, apologetic letter Monday from Colby.

"I guess I'm past the point of being outraged, but it maddens me," the teacher said, recalling that the disappearance of the Russian's letter interrupted a budding friendship.

He said he originally wrote to his friend after the Russian returned to the Soviet Union. But when he did not receive a reply, he decided not to write again because he feared the Soviet government would disprove.

"When you write to a

Soviet citizen, you have to be sort of diplomatic because someone else might open the letter," he said.

"Finally, after seven years, I discover that he ... had replied," McElwain said.

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